

# '82 Courthouse Outmoded

By JAN PADFIELD

Deseret News Staff Writer

**HEBER CITY** — The old Wasatch County courthouse is as hardy as the pioneers who built it. But it is now "over and out" — overcrowded and outmoded.

Construction on the building started in 1878 when ox teams hauled native timber and red sandstone quarried in the hills near Lake Creek, six miles east of town. Lime came from Midway, three miles west.

The laborers and craftsmen were local, also. They built the walls a sturdy three feet thick and extended them six feet deep to form the basement. "The 'finish' work was done with skill and care, on both the exterior and interior.

In 1882 the much needed building was completed, furnished and paid for — without a single petition for federal or state aid!

## Labor Donated

The courthouse was built without an appropriation. Most of the labor was donated, with only a few items, such as plastering, requiring paid help. Minutes of meetings held by elected "selectmen" indicate approval of a claim from time to time with final bills being paid in 1882.

Wasatch County was organized in 1862 and at that time its eastern border extended to the Colorado line.

C. Wayne Whiting, present county clerk and recorder, said the early officials did not record contracts and amounts, but as nearly as can be determined the cost of the building was approximately \$5,000, including furnishings.

At a later date a plank board walk was laid to the street (unpaved) in front, and a wooden picket fence installed. This was replaced by an ornamental iron fence set in concrete posts approximately 10 feet apart. Of this, only the concrete remains.

## COVERS BLOCK

The courthouse was built on the Town Square, an area designated in the late 1860's as the center for ecclesiastical, governmental and social activity.

The square covers an entire block in the middle of this beautiful city, and is the site of the courthouse, Wasatch Stake LDS Tabernacle, completed in 1889, the old Social Hall and the jail. It is maintained as a city park, landscaped with large native trees, most of them brought from nearby mountains many years ago.

The records contain no mention of the jail, except that it is a "cooperative." The east half is owned by the county, the west by Heber City, with the city-county property line dividing it directly through the center.

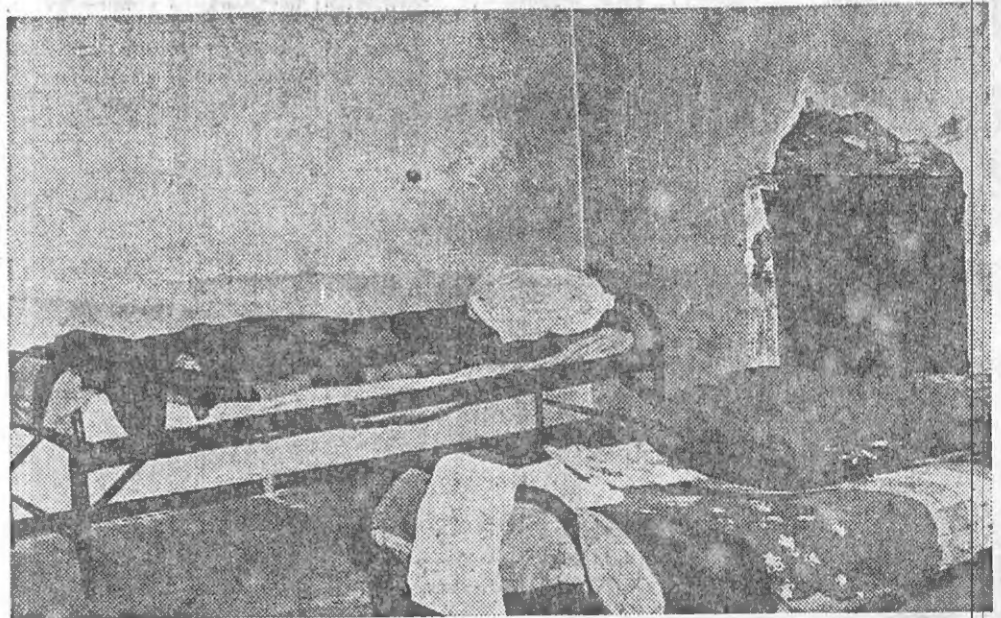
"We should really keep the jail to deter crime. It brings about a quick reform" joked County Commissioner Chairman Walter Montgomery. "Let's say is antiquated and offers



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Commissioner Walter Montgomery stands in doorway decorated by carved panels.



Bare walls of courthouse jail cell are defaced by names of numerous inhabitants over many years. Courthouse would be preserved under Foundation plan.

luxury. It has a distinct sobering effect" countered Mr. Whiting. "We have had prisoners say they didn't enjoy their stay."

The original courthouse was about half the size of the existing building. The "new" section was added in 1924.

Wasatch is one of the state's smaller counties in area but bustling with activity, and the courthouse is obsolete — an inadequate facility. Officials are seriously handicapped by lack of space. "We get more records every year — deeds, tax records — documents that must be preserved indefinitely. Our vaults are crowded, our offices small. You could accurately say 'we're bursting at the seams,'" Mr. Whiting said.

## GOOD CONDITION

Although in good condition through years of conscientious maintenance, the building's coal furnace makes cleaning a problem and "the oldness doesn't lend itself to efficiency." Mr. Montgomery cited the courtroom on the second floor as an

example. "The needs of the Fourth Judicial District, the city's five practicing attorneys, various groups and organizations cannot be met in that small area."

Plans call for construction of a new courthouse this year at a cost of approximately \$300,000.

"We can do this with no tax increase. By next fall we will have approximately \$150,000 in our building fund and can pay off the deficit in about seven years," Mr. Montgomery said.

In 1959 the state legislature made it legal for counties to levy 1½ mills more than necessary to operate through the year, providing the revenue was used for capital improvement. That amount plus county sales tax yields approximately \$20,000 a year, all earmarked for the building.

## COSTS INCREASE

"Since building costs are increasing rapidly, we are losing more than the four per cent we're drawing on reserve funds, and the four per cent interest we would pay is more than off-

set by increasing construction costs," according to Mr. Montgomery.

Wasatch County applied for federal aid in construction of a new building several years ago but under present regulations it is doubtful the county qualifies. At the time of application plans were drawn up for the new courthouse by Lorenzo S. Young and Associates, Salt Lake City.

The structure would be contemporary design, in brick, with all offices on the main floor, except the sheriff's office. That, along with the jail and storage space, would be in the basement. "There would be some modification in the plan now, but basically, it is still right for our needs."

Questioned concerning the movement by Utah Heritage Foundation to preserve Heber City's Town Square as an entity for historical reasons Mr. Montgomery said he thought the present site was ideal for the courthouse, but he was not adverse to another location if the needs and wishes of the people of Wasatch County could be met.

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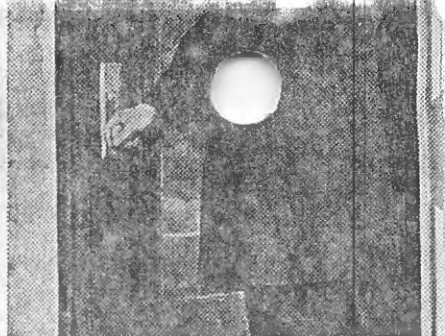
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